

Riding the airwaves

Hortonville students form radio club

By RACHEL RAUSCH
Post-Crescent West

HORTONVILLE — Cell phones, e-mail and text messaging are popular ways for people to stay in contact with each other.

But a group of students at Hortonville High School is using another means of communication to converse, and they're learning

ON THE WEB

Outagamie County Amateur Radio Emergency Service
www.ares.hasdit.com

about science along the way. As members of the newly-formed Amateur Radio Club, the students are able to put their voices out over the airwaves.

High school science teachers Steve Shelton

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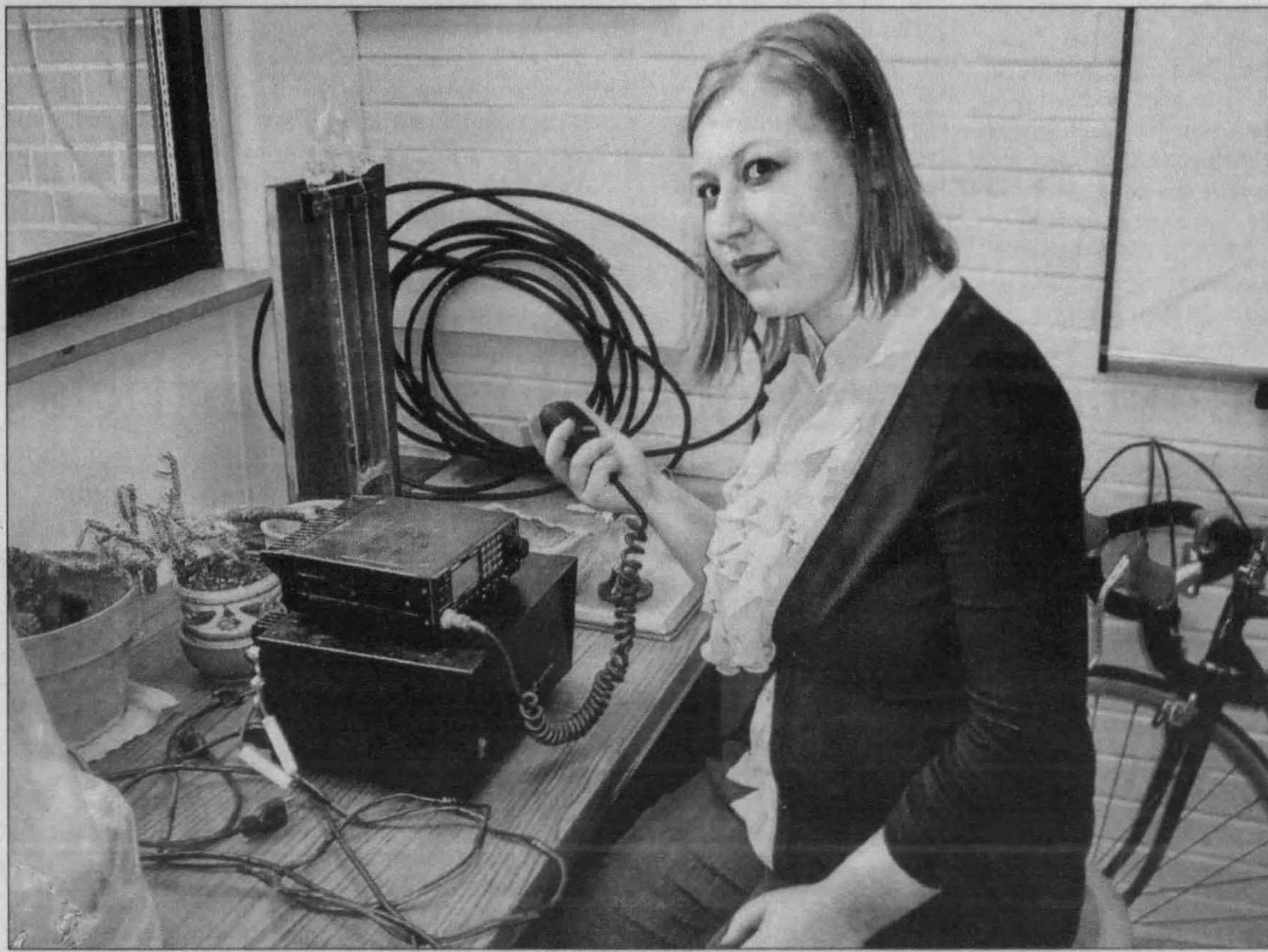


Photo courtesy of Scott Brielmaier

HORTONVILLE HIGH SCHOOL senior Natasha Bruns sets up some equipment during an Amateur Radio Club meeting. Club members are working on acquiring their FCC licenses so they can go on air and talk to other radio operators.

RADIO: School board grant got club going

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and Scott Brielmaier received a grant from the school board to purchase the equipment to get the club off the ground. It blends Shelton's background in meteorology and Brielmaier's experience as a member of the Outagamie County Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES).

"Amateur radio operators often engage in weather spotting for the National Weather Service," Shelton said. "This directly ties in with the weather class we have that teaches students what to spot and what to report — like any severe weather that would endanger the community or cause property damage."

Amateur radio operators also can provide communication during emergencies

or help with communication during large events such as the Community First Fox Cities Marathon.

"It allows users to speak one-on-one quickly," Shelton said. "Unlike walkie-talkies, radio operators don't talk over each other. It's very structured and organized."

Brielmaier has used his radio equipment to contact other amateur operators around the world. He's made contacts with people in Japan, Russia, Germany and even Vatican City.

"There are contests that require operators to contact as many people as they can within a certain amount of time," he said. "We hope to get the kids involved in some of those contests."

Students are in the process of training to earn

their Federal Communications Commission license, which is a requirement to communicate by radio. It involves passing a written test that covers radio fundamentals, rules, basic electronics and safety.

Senior Natasha Bruns has been a dedicated member of the club since it first began meeting last month.

"It sounded really interesting, to be able to talk to people from all over," she said. "And I like the idea of being a volunteer in case of an emergency."

The club has gotten a big boost from Stan Piekarczyk, coordinator of ARES, who offered to donate some equipment and help train the students.

"I think this is fantastic," Piekarczyk said. "It's an introduction to basic physics and you see it working. It's also another

way to stay in contact and make new friends from all over the world."

Radio broadcasting guidelines are strict and the students have to learn what is acceptable and what is not.

"You can't cuss on the radio," Piekarczyk said. "You can't advertise, you can't play music."

Students also must operate at specific frequencies and identify themselves every 10 minutes when they are on the air.

"It's a good way to show them science," Shelton said, "and it promotes good values, common courtesy and professionalism. There's a lot of good that can come out of this and service to the community, too."

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